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## Palazzo Rezzonico

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## Palazzo Rezzonico

Rigidly ordered, the bearded guard  
led me to a shadowed room  
then pulled aside a panel of black  
allowing the cloudy dawn to unveil  
human forms encased in glass.

Living trees had been felled and carved  
to wear the clothes of Venetian dead,  
and here they stood alone or paired, baroque displays, bored by time,  
locked within this noxious cell.  
I logged with word and awkward sketch

Long hidden details of fabric and fit.  
I counted beaded bodice pieces,  
drew skirts held wide by padded hips  
and the placing of laces, ruching, and feathers,  
and rows of dimmed metallic gimp.

One chiseled frame wore Carnival clothes:  
floor-length black cape over rich velvet coat,  
buttons embroidered yet not meant to bind,  
and a three-cornered hat over a painted white mask—  
hard to the mouth, in traditional form,  
then continued below by a beard of black cloth.

His case blocked our view of the Grand canal,  
so my guard became cloaked in his own wooded mask  
and, tired of watching the plod of my hand,  
stared through a dirty, uncurtained pane  
at an open-air courtyard in lifeless collapse.

Then under their bearded human forms,  
I saw by the motionless leather shoes  
industrious worms had started to work—  
their boring task so precisely done,  
that the sawdust was piled in uniform mounds  
as though pinched through the waist of an hourglass.

*Linda Fuller-Smith*